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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W - JIM HUNTER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE: BROKER FOR REGIONAL STABILITY?

REF: FREETOWN 409

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador met July 20 with Foreign Minister Bangura following President Koroma's travel to Conakry for an aborted Mano River Union summit July 14. Minister Bangura was defensive about the need for Sierra Leone to stay engaged with coup leaders Dadis Camara despite ECOWAS, AU and international approbation. We again, (see reftel), pressed home the point that this illegitimate regime should not be granted any credibility. The FoMin took the point but feared that chaos in Guinea would destabilize the region. We note the UK appears to have accepted the GoSL's position. End Summary.

¶2. (C) After learning of the Mano River Union (MRU) cancellation the night of my return (July 14) to post from a TDY in the Department, we began to try to find out what had occurred and I subsequently met with the Foreign Minister. According to our information (and that of the UK's High Commissioner), Gbagbo, Johnson-Sirleaf and Koroma were to hold the MRU in Conakry because Dadis Camara was afraid to leave for a meeting in Monrovia. At the last minute, after Koroma had left for Conakry, the Ivoirian president said he was afraid of the security situation in Guinea and Liberia's Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who had planned to fly with him, was then left without transportation. Koroma arrived, the band played and he was the sole head of state present with no "leader" to greet him. He got back into the helicopter to return to Freetown when Dadis arrived; the band played again and the Sierra Leoneans (including FoMin) decided to stay thinking they could "control" Dadis, according to Bangura.

¶3. (C) The FoMin and I met for about an hour July 20. I told her that it was inappropriate to have bilats with the coup leader; this message had been given to her before as noted in reftel. We added that, furthermore, there had been specific guidelines set out by ECOWAS and the AU regarding Guinea. She protested saying that the GoSL feared Dadis was "crazy" and that someone had to talk with him. I responded that was the International Contact Group's (ICG) role. She asserted that she had stayed in touch with Chambas/ECOWAS the whole time and that body had agreed the region could collapse if Guinea were to face another coup.

¶4. (C) Specifically, she indicated that Sierra Leone could not handle 3 million refugees coming over the border and that Koroma was also trying to obtain some agreement on the troublesome Yenga frontier as well as on narcotics/trafficking. She alluded to the fact that an African leader talking to Dadis was more effective than the Western (ICG) representatives doing so and even stated that it was similar to Africans listening to and hearing U.S. President Obama's message in a way they would not hear it from a person who lacked African descent. (Ironically, Sierra Leone's press is saying precisely because they haven't "heard" Obama is "why" he won't visit "Salone.") The GoSL is calling the Conakry visit "self preservation"; we are telling

them it violates the spirit of the ECOWAS agreement. FYI: Bangura does not think Guinea will have an election until 2011, if then.

15. (C) Subsequently, I had breakfast (July 22) with British High Commissioner Ian Hughes. The UK's view is malleable; they see Koroma's bilat as an attempt to avoid regional chaos and, while supporting the ICG, believe it is necessary to take Sierra Leone's self-interest into account. They expect further guidance from London but anticipate agreement with their view on the ground.

16. (C) Comment: Although the final communique was sent to the United Nations, it was not publicized as a major international document here. Koroma is clearly hesitant to take the bull by the horns fearing complete upset in Sierra Leone which is facing internal dissent over media blackouts, youth employment, and opposition pressure. Sierra Leone-Guinea does not seem to understand it may be compromising its own credibility in the process. End Comment.

PERRY